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Remarkably a bird of 15 feet in size would be the largest bird known in the world today. The largest wingspan known on a living bird is that of the wandering albatross (*diomedea exulans*) with a wingspan to 12 feet, while not a predatory bird it is still an impressive span. The Andean condor (*Vultur gryphus*) and the California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) are among the largest predatory birds in the world, with the Andean condor reaching a wingspan of 10.5 feet and the California condor (the largest North American predatory bird) with a wingspan of up to 10 feet. These are all truly marvelous birds and respectable in their majesty.

But what of a bird, a Thunderbird, that is capable of lifting a deer or a person from the ground. The current predatory birds are not equipped with grasping feet that are strong enough to hold much weight, instead they act more as carrion eaters and are only seldom predatory and then on smaller animals. Yet, reports of the Thunderbird taking deer and humans off the ground are around.

Perhaps the most controversial inclusion of the Thunderbird capable of lifting a human comes from 1977 in Lawndale, Illinois. It was here that on July 25, 1977 towards 9:00 pm at night a group of three boys were in the backyard. They saw two large birds coming, and as the birds came in closer they went after the boys. Two of the boys escaped, but the third, Marlon Lowe, did not. One of the birds clamped onto his shoulder with its claws and proceeded to lift the ten year old boy about two feet off the ground for a distance of at least 30 yards. With screams of distress calling adults outside and coupled with a series of blows by the 65-pound boy, the bird finally released him. The boy was relatively unharmed, with psychological damage instead of physical.

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Thunderbird

The Comanche tribe call it ba'a' and the Potawatomi use the name chequah, but most people know of this mystery animal as Thunderbird. Although gigantic birds are reported in the past and present from various areas of the globe, the one at hand to be dealt with is isolated to North America. Native Americans believed that these giant birds brought thunder and rain with them as they flew through the air by flapping their wings, and lightning by closing their eyes. But, the distinction between the stories of the Native Americans and people of today are not too far apart.

Modern reports of Thunderbirds arise from various locations in North America, with a large occurrence from Pennsylvania to the Central states. Mark A. Hall. One of the foremost investigators of the Thunderbird story, has the following description as a commonality in reports:

"The bird is distinguished by its size and lifting capabilities exceeding those of any known bird living today anywhere in the world. Wingspan estimates are necessarily all guesswork. But observers sometimes have had the benefit of a measurable object for comparison or the benefit of time to observe a resting bird. The results most often provide sizes of 15 to 20 feet... The bird at rest or on the ground appears to be four to eight feet tall... Typically the coloring of the birds overall is dark...."

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Although viewed by some as a tall tale, the descriptions given by the witnesses of these birds describe a large black bird, with a white ring on its neck and a wingspan of up

to 10 feet. Oddly reminiscent of the Andean condor (*Vultur gryphus*) which exhibits the same basic physical characteristics as that of the Lawndale bird. To this day, no one can explain away the incident from 1977 in any convincing manner, either the incident didn't happen or a large bird (of known or unknown status) attacked and carried a small boy one summer night to his and his families terror.

Marlon Lowe and His Attacker
Image by William Rebsamen. Used with his permission.

The evidence thus far for the existence of a large undescribed predatory bird in North America is based on historical and modern anecdotal evidence with no hard physical traces present. There are however two tantalizing images of the Thunderbird, or at least of a large bird. The first was taken in the same year as Marlon Lowe's attack and in the same state.

On July 30, 1977 John Huffer an ex-marine and photographer took a 100 foot roll of color film of two birds taking off from a tree in an inlet of Lake Shelbyville. While the film concentrates on one of the birds only. Highly controversial, and thought by many to be of a turkey vulture, it sits as a little known film of a possible mystery animal. To date little, if any, evaluation of the birds in the film has been done. The Discovery Channel in their program "Into the Unknown" did give the film some mention, with a dismissal of a medium sized bird, probably a vulture.

The other possible photographic evidence is even more of a mystery, as it may not exist at all!! The image in question is the "Thunderbird Photograph" taken at the end of the nineteenth century in Texas. The image is said to depict six western clothed adult men, standing fingertip to fingertip standing in front of a barn were a large bird is nailed to the wall. Many have claimed to have seen or held this infamous image, including the

late Ivan T. Sanderson who reportedly had acquired a photocopy of the image in 1966, in the same year Sanderson gave the image to a couple of Pennsylvanian men who were searching for the Thunderbird. They lost the photocopy in that same year. The image has yet to surface, and may well not exist at all.

The image was reported to have been published in 1886 in the Tombstone Arizona *Epitaph*, however this was reported in a 1963 article by Jack Pearl called "The Monster Bird That Carries Off Human Beings!" in *Saga* magazine. However searches of the Tombstone *Epitaph* have come up empty, aside from an article from April 26, 1890 of a 160 feet bird found in the dessert by a couple of ranchers. So the mystery of the "Thunderbird Photo" is no closer to being solved then it was nearly 40 years ago during its first mention. The case of a photograph, that wasn't!!!

What then is the Thunderbird? It is a mystery. Having been reported by Native Americans and people today from all walks of life as an enormous bird. Larger than any known species, but similar in appearance to a condor.

Theories as to what the Thunderbird may be have ranged the gamut from surviving pterodactyls to the teratorns. The teratorns were large predatory birds from the Pleistocene that exhibited wingspans of upwards of 25 feet. Although thought to have died out, their general presumed appearance is that of a giant condor like species, and with their known wingspan and size, the appearance to the Thunderbird reports is akin.

North America has many mysteries, among them the Thunderbird. Know and reported in legend and other mediums for hundreds of years and across various ethnic boundaries. These creatures are surely one of the most enigmatic cryptids in the world. With misinformation abounding in the way of the "Thunderbird Photograph" and the lack of support in searching for these birds, it is no wonder that these creatures have evaded discovery like so many others from around the world.

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Coelacanth

Maurice Burton in 1956 wrote , "...a living fossil is an organism that has survived beyond its era." What better representative of the idea of a living fossil is there than the coelacanth. Held by many Cryptozoologists as a pedestal to compare the possibilities of prehistoric survival, the coelacanth (*Latimeria chalumnae*) has held a special place in the study of mystery animals.

Thought extinct for some 65 million years, the coelacanth is a lobe-finned fish that appeared within the fossil record during the Devonian period some 350 million years ago. But, on December 22, 1938 the idea of the coelacanths extinction would end. On that day Captain Hendrick Goosen caught a fish in the nets of the trawler *Nerine* at a depth of 230 feet off the coast of South Africa near Cape Town. The fish trawled up was nearly 5 feet in length and just shy of 140 pounds and exhibited a trilobate tail and penonculated fins.

On December 23, 1998 Captain Goosen contacted Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer a taxidermist at *the East London Museum*. She identified the fish as a coelacanth after bringing the specimen to the museum, and latter she verified her suspicions with Professor J.L.B. Smith an ichthyologist at *Cecil Rhodes University* in Grahamstown. Further evaluations were conducted an in 1939 the fish trawled up at the end of 1938 was given the scientific designation *Latimeria chalumnae*, with the genus attributed in honor of Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer.

But, this was but one specimen, what of more? Professor J.L.B. Smith searched for the next two decades for a second specimen of coelacanth. Printing and distributing thousands of leaflets offering a 100 pound reward for a specimen. Finally near Anjouan Island of the Comoros Islands on December 20, 1952 a second specimen was found. Smith named this new find *Malania anjouanae*, but latter it was reverted to *Latimeria chalimnae* after study showed it to be of the same species as the 1938 discovery.

Since 1952 over 200 specimens have been captured around the Comoros Islands in waters of up to 2000 feet deep. Some fear that the capturing of the specimens for study and inadvertent catching of them by business owners would lead to the coelacanths second extinction, and then a new population was found.

In September 1997 Dr. Mark Erdmann and Arnaz Mehta while on their honeymoon in Indonesia saw what they believed to be a coelacanth in a fish market on the island of Sulawesi. The fish was photographed, and financing was arranged in the United States to look into the matter more by the Smithsonian Institute and the National Geographic Society. On July 30, 1998 Dr. Erdmann was presented with a living fish captured by a local fisherman named Lameh Sonathon. This damper colored fish (the African coelacanths were silvery-blue and turned damper brown after death) lived for several hours. Genetic tests performed on the Indonesian coelacanths showed a divergence in the genetic makeup from the Comorian coelacanths. This divergence was up to 4.85% allowing for a new scientific classification for the Indonesian coelacanth, *Latimeria menadoensis*.

There are some researchers who feel that the genetic and morphological differences between the Comorian and Indonesian coelacanths are not enough to allow a separate species classification. But, Claude Combes in an article entitled *Coelacanthes. Metapopulation u clade?* From *Comptes redis de l'Academie des sciences - Serie III*:

"Even if a single specimen could be studied now, the Indonesian coelacanth is isolated from the Comorian population both by distance and the deep portions of the Indian Ocean. The genetic divergence is in the order of magnitude usually admitted for closely related but distinct species. If morphological differences are taken into account, the description of Latimeria menadoensis thus appears as justified."

This second known population of coelacanths extends the population lines over 6000 miles. Making one wonder where else relic populations could be surviving? French cryptozoologist Michel Raynal even prior to the discovery of the second Indonesian coelacanth population broached such a thought. Hinted rumors of stray coelacanth catches have filtered in since 1938. For example a specimen was captured off the south-westerly coast of Madagascar in August of 1995, this being over 1000 miles from the Comoros Islands.

These coelacanth populations regardless of any debate of classification, remain a key point in the history of cryptozoology. Locals, who named these fish different names, hinted at their existence before scientific evidence authenticated the existence of the coelacanth. The Comoro native fishermen called the Comorian coelacanth m'tsamboidoi or kombessa, and used them for food and the scales for various applications. In Indonesia the Indonesian coelacanth was known as the rajalaut. Proving once again that local peoples know the animal life of their waters and land better than an outside scientific community.

Do other populations of coelacanths exist in the oceans of the world? Time will be the ultimate testament to the continuing marvel of the coelacanth.

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The Denizen of Lake Champlain

When one says Lake Monster, the initial response is a connection to the most famous lake creature of them all, Nessie of Loch Ness in Scotland. However, North America has a rich history of Lake Creatures as well. Ranging from Ogopogo in Okanagan Lake of British Columbia, to Tessie of Lake Tahoe in California to perhaps the most famous lake creature Champ from Lake Champlain in Vermont, New York and Quebec (Canada).

Lake Champlain has been called the other great lake due to its size and depth. The lake border Vermont and New York on the American side and Quebec on the Canadian side, and runs from Whitehall, New York to the Richelieu River in Quebec. Stretching 109 miles in length and up to 11 miles in width, the lake boasts impressive depths to 400 feet and a water area of 440 square miles. The lake itself formed around 10,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age, prior to that the Champlain area (named after the explorer Samuel de Champlain from his exploration in the 1600's) was made of an arm of the Atlantic Ocean called the Champlain Sea.

Early history of the area in relation to the creature now given the moniker of Champ, can be traced back to the original inhabitants, the Native Americans. At least three bands of Native Americans lived in the area, the Iroquois on the western side (Vermont side now) and the Abnaki and Algonquin groups on the eastern side (New York side now). These groups of Native Americans had stories associated with a horned serpent which may be a link to reports of the lake creature exhibiting horn like protuberances from its head, or may be but a symbolic term associated with ancestral beliefs. The other tie to the horned serpent belief may lie within the odd formations of Split Rock (near Essex, New York now) wherein natural forming rock structures resembled petrified snakes. The tribes of the area revered these snake like formations. The tribes reportedly had a name for the horned serpents of the lake, chaousarou, but this name may also be linked to one of the fish species of the lake and not the creature itself.

The current interest in the creature of Lake Champlain stretches back to July 1609 when Samuel de Champlain recorded seeing a serpentine like creature in the lake. Sometimes thought today to be a recording of a sturgeon, it marks the beginning of the current Champ history that continues to this day. The history continues with sporadic reports in the 1800's. Although few to no reports from the 1700's, the area did not become settled until the end of the 18th century, with few people in the area the chronicling of events from the terrain is next to impossible. But, as the area became more populated the reports appeared more regularly, until the mid 1800's when reports were coming in every year.

In the 1970's the Lake Champlain Phenomena Investigation (LCPI) group was formed, headed by Joseph Zarzynski. The formation and active research of this area resurrected the legend of Lake Champlain, and once again brought it into the attention of the world. Through water surveillance and interviews, the LCPI slowly gathered reports and arbitrary clues towards the existence of Champ. During this time a photograph was taken.

Sandra Mansi, on July 5, 1977 near St. Albans, Vermont took a snapshot using a Kodak Instamatic camera. This image, revealed three years after its taking, showed what appeared to be the neck and back of a large creature in the water. Highly contested by some due to the delay of coming forward, and the lose of the original negative, this photographic image is now the most famous image of Champ.

Dr. Paul H. LeBlond, best known for his work with the unknown sea creature called Caddy or Cadborosaurus, performed an analysis of the creature in the Mansi photograph. Using wave size estimates from a mariner's standard practice of the Beaufort scale he was able to estimate the lower and upper range of size associated with the image, which tie in with Sandra Mansi's account of the size. LeBlond's estimated size was 4.8 m to 17.2 m, which ties close to Mansi's estimate of 15 to 20 feet (4.6 - 6.1 m).

Regardless of the authenticity of the Mansi photograph, studies of behavior and patterns have been done on lake Champlain to at least offer an idea of search times and behavior cycles. For example, how does the creature live during the winter seasons, wherein the waters surface at times does freeze? The reports of these creatures breaking ice are scant, with only a handful. So, the problems must be addressed: 1) Do these creatures migrate to the oceans, 2) Do these creatures make breathing holes, 3) Does a form of hibernation occur in an underwater cave, 4) Do they live in underground caves with air circulation and making occasional food jaunts during the winter months. As the lake is tied off to the ocean through a series of dams and blocked tributaries, it is unlikely that they would travel to the ocean. With only a handful of reports of ice breaking, the second scenario is also weak. The last two are the best explanations, and with the geological makeup of the area, underwater caves are a possibility.

Other researchers have used past reports to isolate the time frame of sightings and thus possible behavior directions. The reports do occur mainly at dusk and dawn, suggestive of a nocturnal behavior (which would limit the number of sightings by people). Additionally, researcher Dennis Jay Hall, who heads Champquest (and the main researcher in the area now since Zarzynski has stepped down and the LCPI is inactive now) has studied the incidents for nearly 20 years. Claiming sightings on 19 different occasions he predicts that sightings will occur within five days before and after the new moon of each month, and at night. Hall claims a 75% success rate in these predictions based off of eyewitness reports.

What is Champ? Does that really matter? Champ is the creature of Lake Champlain. Whether it turns out to be a primitive whale called a zeuglodon that some feel it is, or a Tatystropheus (a form of long necked reptiles similar to a plesiosaur) as Dennis Jay Hall fells they are. The fact remains that there is a mystery present within the lake, that stretches back hundred of years and through hundred if not thousands of people. The mystery of Lake Champlain has endured, and that in itself speaks volumes.

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